



EmployeeUPDATE

Our Mission: To serve the people of North Carolina by enabling individuals, families and communities to be healthy and secure, and to achieve social and economic well-being.

A monthly publication for employees of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Dear DHHS Employee,

This newsletter is totally devoted to one subject – the flu. It is designed to give you information that will be helpful to surviving this year's flu season and planning for a potential flu pandemic.

As we enter this year's flu season, I want to stress that our employees are our most important resource. Please take good care of yourself and your family. Make sure to get a flu shot. Make sure that your family members get their shots.

We don't know when or if a flu pandemic will hit, but we do need to be prepared. Many DHHS employees will be vital to a flu pandemic response, so it is particularly important that you be prepared.

Finally, keep this copy of the newsletter. It contains vital information that you can refer to during this flu season and in planning for a pandemic.

Sincerely,


Carmen Hooker Odom

Preparing for a Pandemic: Checklists

We realize that you may need more help in preparing for a pandemic flu. This newsletter includes checklists to help you prepare your family and your church/civic group.

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November 2006 Special Edition:
**Pandemic Flu
and You**

Flu – An Overview

Seasonal influenza is a very contagious respiratory virus that occurs annually. The season begins in October and runs through March. Each year, an average of 200,000 Americans is hospitalized as a result of seasonal flu. Another 36,000 die from influenza infection or a complication like pneumonia. The very old and the very young are most likely to be seriously affected.

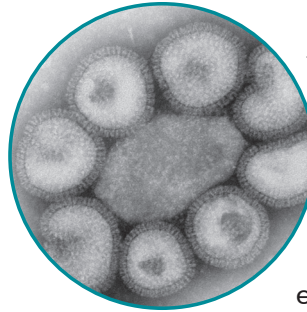
Pandemic influenza is different than seasonal influenza. It occurs when a new influenza virus surfaces – one that people have no immunity against. Because people have no immunity – and there is no vaccine against this new strain – large numbers of people across the world will get sick and some of them will die.

There were three influenza pandemics during the 20th century. The “Spanish” flu pandemic of 1918-19 was the most notorious; over 20 to 40 million people died worldwide. In the United States, over 500,000 people died; most of these deaths occurred in healthy young adults.

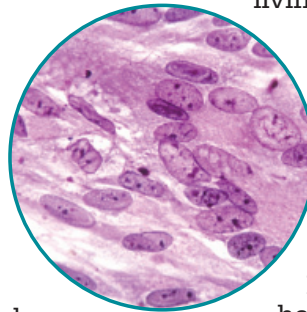
Influenza viruses are constantly changing; they have the ability to mutate in two different ways. Small mutations occur almost every year. That’s why there is a new flu vaccine every year.

Large mutations occur every 20-40 years or so. The result is a new influenza virus to which the human population has no protection.

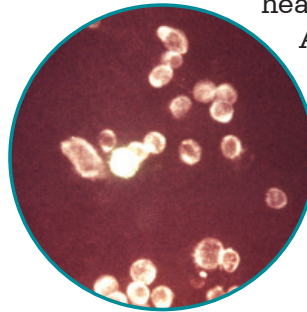
These large mutations are almost always followed by an influenza pandemic.



Avian influenza (bird flu) viruses can be a source of new influenza viruses. Humans can not catch bird flu easily. But, the recent bird flu outbreak in Asia has shown that this does happen. Most of the infected people had very close exposure to sick birds. In many cases, the infected people were literally living with chickens.



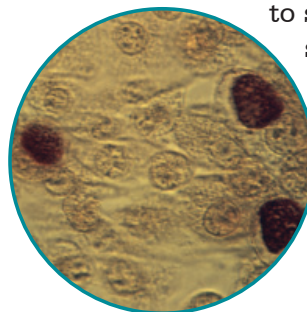
The fear is that a person infected with the seasonal flu could become infected with the Avian flu, and the two viruses could combine into a new virus that can easily be spread person to person. So far, that hasn't happened. But the possibility of that happening is why the entire world health community is focused on the Avian or bird flu.



The purpose of planning for pandemic influenza is to:

- reduce sickness
- reduce death
- minimize social disruption

This newsletter will give you hints on how to stay healthy during this year’s flu season and how to prepare yourself and your family for a pandemic.



How Do I Prepare For This Year's Flu Season?

When it comes to seasonal flu, the best offense is a good defense. Get your flu shot. Unlike in past years, there is plenty of available vaccine. Make sure that your family is also protected.

A flu shot is a good idea for anyone. Some people are considered more high-risk and should make every effort to get vaccinated. These groups include:

- *Adults 50 years old and older*
- *Residents of nursing homes*
- *People 5-49 years of age with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease or other chronic conditions*
- *Household contacts of people at high risk for complications*
- *Healthcare workers*
- *Pregnant women*
- *Children 6-59 months old*

Healthcare workers are particularly encouraged to receive flu vaccine – to protect not only themselves from the disease, but to also help prevent transmission of it to their patients, coworkers, family members and close contacts. That means you, if you are a DHHS health care worker.

You can also take actions to stop the spread of the flu and other viruses. Those steps include:

- *Wash your hands frequently.*
- *Cover your coughs and sneezes.*
- *Use disposable tissues and throw them away immediately*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.*
- *If you are sick, stay home.*
- *If your children are sick, keep them home.*



Preparing for a Pandemic

There is no pandemic flu in the world today. No one knows when or where a pandemic may begin or how severe it will be. But, North Carolina must be ready. The North Carolina Division of Public Health and local health departments are leading those preparation efforts.

Now is the time to prepare for pandemic flu. This preparation will help you cope with other emergencies, like hurricanes or ice storms.

You may be confused about the differences between seasonal flu, pandemic flu and bird flu.

Seasonal flu is the yearly flu. North Carolina's flu season runs from October through April. The seasonal flu is a respiratory virus that is spread person to person. This wintertime respiratory illness is marked by a fever and symptoms like coughing and sneezing. People usually have some immunity against the seasonal flu. There is also a vaccine available to prevent the seasonal flu. This vaccine must be given every year, beginning in the fall months.

Bird flu is just that – a flu that affects birds. There has been a lot of attention focused on a bird flu outbreak that began in Asia in the late 1990s. That strain of flu, which is called H5N1, is highly contagious among birds. A small number of people have been infected with the virus through very close contact with birds, or very close contact with another person with this strain of bird flu.

A pandemic flu occurs when a new flu virus appears in humans, spreads easily from person-to-person, causes serious illness, and moves across the

globe. Flu pandemics are caused by new flu viruses. Because they are new, humans have little or no immunity to them, leading to rapid disease spread from person to person. THERE IS CURRENTLY NO PANDEMIC FLU.

North Carolina public health has a history of responding to emergency situations. Public health helps communities respond to and recover from natural disasters like hurricanes and ice storms as well as to new diseases. Public health professionals are working now to ensure that the state is prepared for a pandemic flu. They:

- *Use technology to detect unusual illnesses at hospital emergency departments across North Carolina.*
- *Educate health care workers to be on the alert for the signs of unusual illness.*
- *Prepare to distribute vaccines and antiviral medications in the event of a pandemic.*
- *Work with education, business, community and faith groups to help everyone prepare for a pandemic.*

If a pandemic occurs, public health officials will take action to slow the spread of the disease. Actions you can take include:

- *Avoid unnecessary social gatherings, meetings or travel.*
- *Allow workers to work at home or to limit close contact at work.*
- *Avoid large gatherings like ball games or concerts.*

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- *Make plans on what you could or could not do if children were at home from schools because authorities may decide to close schools and child care facilities.*

You can take actions now to get ready for a pandemic flu:

- **Learn and practice respiratory etiquette.** *That means covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing so you don't spread germs, avoiding touching your eyes or nose unless you've washed your hands, and staying home while ill.*
- **Get healthy.** *A healthy person is better able to deal with an infection like the flu. Now is the time to get your weight under control, be physically fit, stop using tobacco and cut back on alcohol use.*
- **Keep your immunizations up-to-date,** *particularly the pneumonia vaccine that is recommended for seniors and others at high-risk for flu complications.*
- **Stock your pantry.** *Store a supply of food that has a long shelf life and does not need to be cooked. Your pantry should include things like tuna, sardines, peanut butter, crackers, powdered milk and bottled water.*

Even if a pandemic doesn't occur, this food will help you get through a power outage from a winter storm or a hurricane.

- **Don't wait until the last minute.** *Make it a habit to fill prescriptions before they run out...or keep your car's gas tank full.*
- **Stay informed.** *Public health officials will work with the news media to reach you in the event of a pandemic flu.*

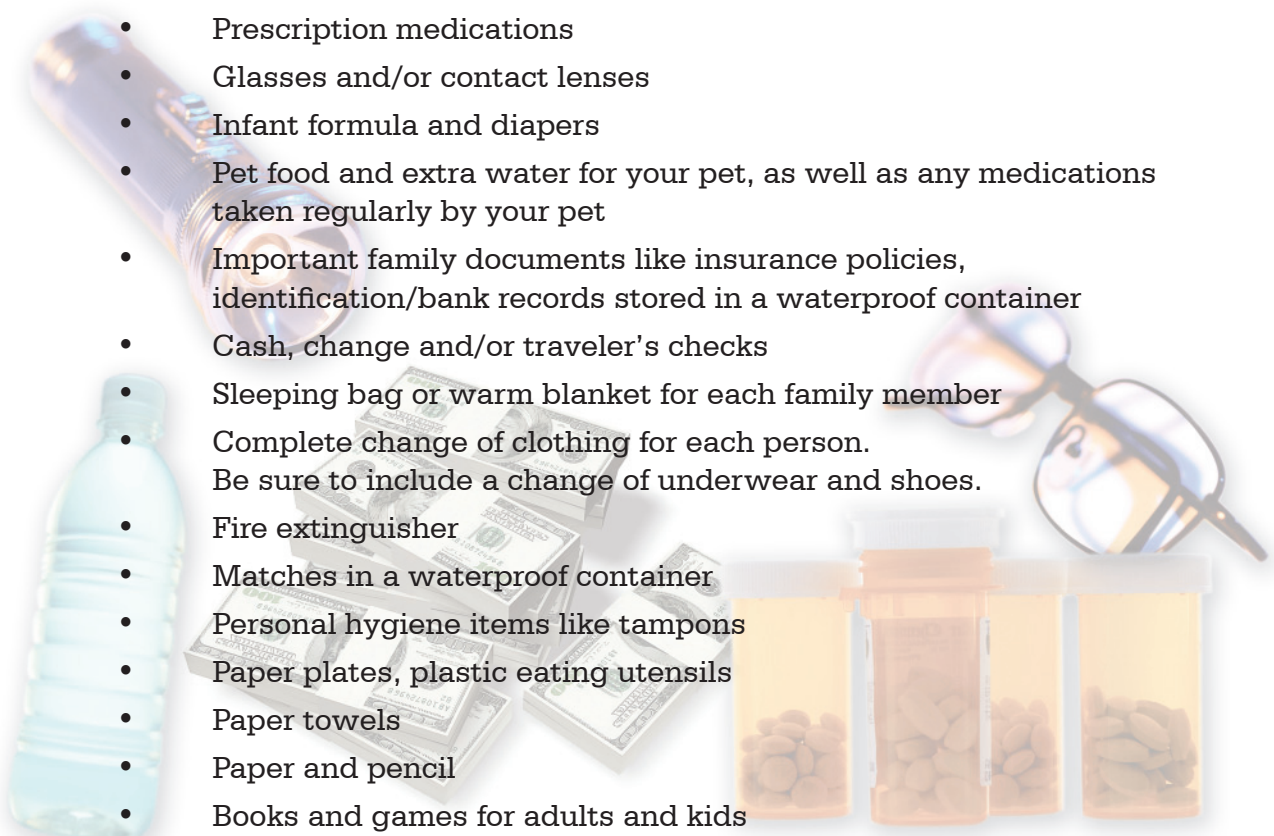
You can also practice respiratory etiquette. Even if a pandemic flu never occurs, these measures will slow the spread of illness like the common cold, the seasonal flu and lots of other bugs that can make you sick:

- *Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based gels.*
- *Always cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.*
- *Use a disposable tissue and throw it away at once. Wash your hands again.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Keep your children home if they are sick.*
- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*

Pandemic Flu and You

Recommended items to include in a basic emergency kit:

- Water – one gallon per person per day for two weeks
- Food – a two-week supply of non-perishable food like canned soups and meats (be sure to include a can opener)
- Battery operated or hand-crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio
- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Cell phone
- First aid kit (see other side of this handout for ideas about what the kit should contain)
- Whistle to signal for help
- Moist towelettes and/or liquid hand sanitizer
- Household chlorine bleach and a medicine dropper. When diluted nine parts water to one part bleach, bleach can be used as a disinfectant. In an emergency, you can use it to treat water by adding 16 drops to a gallon of water. DO NOT use scented, color-safe bleach or bleaches with added cleaners
- Prescription medications
- Glasses and/or contact lenses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet, as well as any medications taken regularly by your pet
- Important family documents like insurance policies, identification/bank records stored in a waterproof container
- Cash, change and/or traveler's checks
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each family member
- Complete change of clothing for each person. Be sure to include a change of underwear and shoes.
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Personal hygiene items like tampons
- Paper plates, plastic eating utensils
- Paper towels
- Paper and pencil
- Books and games for adults and kids



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Pandemic Flu and You

Making a First Aid Kit

You can purchase a ready-made, inexpensive first aid kit, or you can make your own. If you make your own, here are the items to include:

- Two pairs of Latex, or other sterile gloves (if you are allergic to Latex)
- Sterile dressings to stop bleeding
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Tongue depressor blades
- Cleansing agent/soap and antibiotic towelettes to disinfect
- Antibiotic ointment to prevent infection
- Burn ointment to prevent infection
- Adhesive bandages in a variety of sizes
- Nonstick sterile pads
- Eye wash solution
- Thermometer
- Ice pack
- Tube of petroleum jelly or other lubricant
- Prescription medications you take every day such as insulin, heart medicine and asthma inhalers. You should periodically rotate medicines to account for expiration dates.
- Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment and supplies or a nebulizer machine.
- Pain and fever reducers, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen
- Anti-itch medications, like hydrocortizone cream
- An antihistamine, like Benadryl, for allergic reactions
- Laxative

Don't forget your four-legged friends. They may have emergency first aid needs as well.

Pandemic Flu and You



Preparing Your Family

Now is the time to prepare for a pandemic flu. Even if a pandemic flu doesn't happen, this preparation will prove useful in the event of other disasters like hurricanes and ice storms. Whether it is pandemic flu or a storm, your world may be seriously disrupted. Grocery stores and drug stores may be closed or short of supplies. You and your family need to be ready. Here's a check list to help you get ready and avoid a last minute rush.

Store Enough Food and Water for Two Weeks

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Have a two week supply of food and water on hand. Set aside one gallon of water a day for each person in your household. Stock things like canned meat and powdered milk.</p> <p>The list on the back of this announcement has good ideas about food you can store for you and your family.</p>

Obtain Needed Medications

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If you or a family member takes regular prescription drugs, make sure you have at least one extra month's worth of the prescription. If your insurance will not agree to cover the extra supply, you may need to pay out-of-pocket. Talk with your doctor or insurance company about how to arrange this. You don't want to run out of a necessary drug when supplies may be disrupted or drug stores closed. This includes medications for diabetes and other life-saving medications. A disaster is stressful for everybody and taking care of your family's health is top priority.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Have a first aid kit on hand which includes pain relievers, stomach remedies and cough and cold medicine.</p> <p>The checklist on the back of this announcement gives good ideas about medicines you should have on hand.</p>

Prepare Other Emergency Supplies

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Think now about what you will do if power is disrupted or if other emergency issues arise. Always have an emergency supply of cash on hand, so you won't have to rely on an ATM.</p> <p>A list on the back of this checklist includes other items you may need.</p>

Plan for Your Pet

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Pets are a vital part of many households. Make sure that you have two weeks supply of food and water on hand for them as well as their rabies/immunization records, leash and identification tags.</p>

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Talk It Over

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sit down now and talk with your loved ones, especially the ones who don't live with you, about how they will be cared for in the event of a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Think about how you would care for people in your family who have disabilities if support services are not available.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make sure that you have plans in place to assure that your loved ones are taken care of in the event of a pandemic. For general preparedness, agree on a point of contact where all family members can check-in if you are separated during any emergency. The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if you prepare ahead of time.
			Preparing for a disaster will help bring peace of mind and confidence to deal with a pandemic.

Examples of food and non-perishables	Examples of medical, health, and emergency supplies
Ready-to-eat canned meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, and soups	Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood-pressure monitoring equipment
Protein or fruit bars	Soap and water, or alcohol-based (60-95%) hand wash
Dry cereal or granola	Medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
Peanut butter or nuts	Thermometer
Dried fruit	Anti-diarrheal medication
Crackers	Vitamins
Canned juices	Fluids with electrolytes
Bottled water	Cleansing agent/soap
Canned or jarred baby food and formula	Flashlight
Pet food	Batteries
Other non-perishable items	Portable radio
	Manual can opener
	Garbage bags

Pandemic Flu and You



Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist

The collaboration of Faith-Based and Community Organizations with public health agencies will be essential in protecting the public's health and safety if and when an influenza pandemic occurs. This checklist provides guidance for religious organizations (churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc.), social service agencies that are faith-based, and community organizations in developing and improving influenza pandemic response and preparedness plans. Many of the points suggested here can improve your organization's ability to protect your community during emergencies in general. You can find more information at www.pandemicflu.gov.

1. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your organization and its mission:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assign key staff with the authority to develop, maintain and act upon an influenza pandemic preparedness and response plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on your organization's usual activities and services. Plan for situations likely to require increasing, decreasing or altering the services your organization delivers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on outside resources that your organization depends on to deliver its services (e.g., supplies, travel, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outline what the organizational structure will be during an emergency and revise periodically. The outline should identify key contacts with multiple back-ups, role and responsibilities, and who is supposed to report to whom.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify and train essential staff (including full-time, part-time and unpaid or volunteer staff) needed to carry on your organization's work during a pandemic. Include back up plans, cross-train staff in other jobs so that if staff are sick, others are ready to come in to carry on the work.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Test your response and preparedness plan using an exercise or drill, and review and revise your plan as needed.

2. Communicate with and educate your staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information and other public health advisories from state and local health departments, emergency management agencies, and CDC. Make this information available to your organization and others.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Distribute materials with basic information about pandemic influenza: signs and symptoms, how it is spread, ways to protect yourself and your family (e.g., respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette), family preparedness plans, and how to care for ill persons at home.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When appropriate, include basic information about pandemic influenza in public meetings (e.g. sermons, classes, trainings, small group meetings and announcements).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share information about your pandemic preparedness and response plan with staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop tools to communicate information about pandemic status and your organization's actions. This might include websites, flyers, local newspaper announcements, pre-recorded widely distributed phone messages, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider your organization's unique contribution to addressing rumors, misinformation, fear and anxiety.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Advise staff, members, and persons in the communities you serve to follow information provided by public health authorities--state and local health departments, emergency management agencies, and CDC.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that what you communicate is appropriate for the cultures, languages and reading levels of your staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve.

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3. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your staff, members, and the communities that you serve:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan for staff absences during a pandemic due to personal and/or family illnesses, quarantines, and school, business, and public transportation closures. Staff may include full-time, part-time and volunteer personnel.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work with local health authorities to encourage yearly influenza vaccination for staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate access to mental health and social services during a pandemic for your staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve; improve access to these services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify persons with special needs (e.g. elderly, disabled, limited English speakers) and be sure to include their needs in your response and preparedness plan. Establish relationships with them in advance so they will expect and trust your presence during a crisis.

4. Set up policies to follow during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up policies for non-penalized staff leave for personal illness or care for sick family members during a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up mandatory sick-leave policies for staff suspected to be ill, or who become ill at the worksite. Employees should remain at home until their symptoms resolve and they are physically ready to return to duty (Know how to check up-to-date CDC recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up policies for flexible work hours and working from home.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate your organization's usual activities and services (including rites and religious practices if applicable) to identify those that may facilitate virus spread from person to person. Set up policies to modify these activities to prevent the spread of pandemic influenza (e.g. guidance for respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, and instructions for persons with influenza symptoms to stay home rather than visit in person.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Follow CDC travel recommendations during an influenza pandemic. Recommendations may include restricting travel to affected domestic and international sites, recalling non-essential staff working in or near an affected site when an outbreak begins, and distributing health information to persons who are returning from affected areas.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set procedures for activating your organization's response plan when an influenza pandemic is declared by public health authorities and altering your organization's operations accordingly.

5. Allocate resources to protect your staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine the amount of supplies needed to promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette and how they will be obtained.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider focusing your organization's efforts during a pandemic to providing services that are most needed during the emergency (e.g. mental/spiritual health or social services).

6. Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understand the roles of federal, state, and local public health agencies and emergency responders and what to expect and what not to expect from each in the event of a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work with local and/or state public health agencies, emergency responders, local healthcare facilities and insurers to understand their plans and what they can provide, share about your preparedness and response plan and what your organization is able to contribute, and take part in their planning. Assign a point of contact to maximize communication between your organization and your state and local public health systems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coordinate with emergency responders and local healthcare facilities to improve availability of medical advice and timely/urgent healthcare services and treatment for your staff, members, and persons in the communities that you serve.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share what you've learned from developing your preparedness and response plan with other Faith-Based and Community Organizations to improve community response efforts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work together with other Faith-Based and Community Organizations in your local area and through networks (e.g. denominations, associations, etc) to help your communities prepare for pandemic influenza.